 Reading time: 4 min.

*Today **I bid you farewell for the last time** from this page of the Salesian Bulletin. On 16 August, the day we commemorate Don Bosco's birth, my service as Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco ends.*
It is always a reason to give thanks! First of all to God, to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, to so many dear people and friends, to so many friends of Don Bosco's charism, the many benefactors.

On this occasion too, my greeting conveys something I have experienced recently. Hence the title of this greeting: A mixture of admiration and sorrow. Let me tell you about the joy that filled my heart in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, wounded by an interminable war, and the joy and testimony I received yesterday.

Three weeks ago, after visiting Uganda (in the Palabek refugee camp which, thanks to Salesian help and work in recent years, is no longer a camp for Sudanese refugees but a place where tens of thousands of people have settled and found a new life), I crossed Rwanda and arrived at the border in the region of Goma, a wonderful area, beautiful and rich in nature (and precisely for this reason so desired and desirable). Well, because of the armed conflicts, there are more than a million displaced people in that region who have had to leave their homes and their land. We too had to leave our Salesian presence in Sha-Sha, which was occupied militarily.

This million displaced people arrived in the city of Goma. In Gangi, one of the districts, there is the Don Bosco Salesian work. I was immensely happy to see the good that is being done there. Hundreds of boys and girls have a home. Dozens of teenagers have been taken off the streets and are living in the Don Bosco house. It was there, because of the war, that 82 newborn babies and young boys and girls who lost their parents or were left behind ('abandoned') because their parents could not look after them, found a home.

And there, in that new Valdocco, one of the many Valdocco's around the world, a community of three Sisters from San Salvador, together with a group of women, all supported by the Salesian house with aid that arrives thanks to the generosity of benefactors and Providence, take care of these little boys and girls. When I went to visit them, the Sisters had dressed everyone up, even the children sleeping in their cots. How could I not feel my heart filled with joy at this reality of goodness, despite the pain caused by abandonment and war!

But my heart was touched when I met several hundred people who came to greet me on the occasion of my visit. They are among the 32,000 displaced people who left their homes and their land because of the bombs and came to seek refuge. They found it in the fields and grounds of the Don Bosco house in Gangi. They have nothing, they live in shacks of a few square metres. This is their reality. Together every day we look for a way to find food for them. But do you know what struck me most? What impressed me most was that when I was with these hundreds of people, mostly elderly people and mothers with children, they had not lost their dignity and had not lost their joy or their smile. I was amazed and my heart was saddened by so much suffering and poverty, even though we are doing our part in the name of the Lord.

An extraordinary concert

I experienced another great joy when I received a testimony of life that made me think of the teenagers and young people in our presence, and of the many children of parents who may be reading me and who feel that their children are unmotivated, bored by life, or have no passion for almost anything. Among the guests in our house these days was an extraordinary pianist who has toured the world giving concerts and has been part of great philharmonic orchestras. She is a former pupil of the Salesians and had a Salesian, now deceased, as a great reference and model. She wanted to offer us this concert in the atrium of the Sacred Heart Church as a homage to Mary Help of Christians, whom she loves so much, and as a thank you for all that her life has been so far.

And I say the latter because our dear friend gave us a wonderful concert, with exceptional quality at the age of 81. She was accompanied by her daughter. And at that age, perhaps when some of our elders in the family have long since said that they no longer want to do anything, or do anything that requires effort, our dear friend, who practises the piano every day, moved her hands with wonderful agility and was immersed in the beauty of music and its performance. Good music, a generous smile at the end of her performance, and the handing over of orchids to Our Lady Help of Christians were all we needed on that wonderful morning. And my Salesian heart could not help but think of those boys, girls and young people who perhaps have had or no longer have anything to motivate them in their lives. She, our concert pianist friend, lives with great serenity at 81 years of age and, as she told me, continues to offer the gift God has given her and every day she finds more and more reasons to do so.

Another lesson in life and another testimony that does not leave one’s heart indifferent.

Thank you, my friends, thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the good we are doing together. However small it may be, it contributes to making our world a little more human and more beautiful. May the good Lord bless you.